

Remembering Cheryl Neuzeman A Passionate, Consummate Advocate 1947–2012

Child passenger safety and youth traffic safety have lost a consummate advocate. These were Cheryl's passions during a career of close to 40 years. She began in her young children's school parent-teacher association (PTA) during the late 1970s. She received one of the first PTA grants from NHTSA and General Motors for CPS promotion. Beginning in 1985, she managed the CPS program of the Iowa Highway Safety Bureau, moved on to New York City as director of safety education in the Department of Transportation, and from there went to NHTSA to work in the Office of Occupant Protection in 1990.

During her 22 years with NHTSA, she spearheaded the first Standardized Child Passenger Safety Certification Program and fostered the National Organization for Youth Safety (NOYS). She worked with the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention and, later, the federal Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Preventing Underage Drinking.

SRN publisher Deborah Stewart, who knew Cheryl well for over 30 years, says, "I was always amazed by Cheryl's seemingly endless energy, creativity, and commitment to children and teens. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and she could communicate with everyone from physicians to used car dealers. Her spirit and work will live on in everything we do."

Personal Reminiscences

"The 'Star' of the East burst upon the national child passenger safety scene in the late 70's when NHTSA held a "Tri-Regional CPS Conference" in Seattle. Cheryl wasn't the star then—**just an enthusiastic housewife raising three young kids** in Clinton, Iowa and fired up about child safety seats. Knowing about her reputation as a volunteer community leader, I invited her to attend.

"Cheryl's energy, knowledge, and organizational talents lead to her appointment in 1985 to the staff of the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau (TSB) in Iowa, where she fanned the flickering flame of Child Passenger Safety. She also was a lay leader in the drive to pass a seat belt use law in Iowa and helped to push that effort over

the top. With those accomplishments, Mike Laski, head of TSB, gave her the "Star" nickname—and it stuck—although she never acted like a "star." She carried the flame on from Iowa to the traffic safety program in New York City, and from there to NHTSA in 1990.

"Many of us shared in the drive for passenger safety, but the truth is that, **without the energy brought by this bright light, the drive wouldn't have gone nearly so far—or so fast.**"

—Carl Wells, former Seat Belt Coordinator for Iowa TSB and NHTSA Region VI



Cheryl receiving recognition from NHTSA Administrator David Strickland at her retirement party in early 2012.

"While Cheryl was working at Iowa TSB

she did a lot of coordination with Traffic Safety Now (TSN), the national organization promoting state seat belt laws, funded by auto manufacturers. They set up the Border-to-Border Run to enhance the knowledge about seatbelt use. Cars carrying survivors whose lives had been saved per a seat belt in crashes started from both the Mexican and the Canadian borders and drove the interstates to meet in St. Louis. As they went through states, new cars and survivors were added to the caravans. The cars were all white with red and blue signs on them, with walkie-talkies in each car to communicate!!

"Cheryl and I were drivers and joined the caravan with our Iowa survivors. In St. Louis, the caravans met and there was a big press event on Labor Day. It was really a lot of fun and the publicity was GREAT!!!

"All the time that Cheryl was working in Iowa, she did a lot of traveling, but **her children and family were the most important thing to her.** Her children would go with her when they could. They helped with set up and tearing down at events, carrying dolls, child safety seats, and anything else we needed. On top of all the work she did, she raised three very fine adults."

—Jan Goldsmith, Iowa TSB (retired)

"I have many vivid memories of Cheryl over her years of service to the Committee on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention (COIVPP)... [During one meeting, she was] the life of the party when at 2 AM we had a fire alarm at the Rosemont Sofitel and gathered in the lobby, disheveled in pajamas and sweats.

Cheryl was a **devoted mother** to her children and we were always eager to hear at each successive meeting what was next in their eventful lives.

On a serious note, Cheryl was a tremendous force in accomplishing several seminal AAP Policies that have been repeatedly reaffirmed and serve today as the basis quoted in directing care for children related to child occupant protection. The one I remember most is "Safe Transportation of Newborns at Hospital Discharge" as Cheryl recommended and urged inclusion of several statements that have stood the test of time and placed the AAP at the forefront of promotion of Hospital Policy development. In conclusion, **Cheryl was a driving force and role model for us all who embrace child passenger safety in this country.** She is passionate, evidence based and a consummate advocate."

—Marilyn Bull, MD

Professor of Pediatrics
Riley Hospital for Children at IU Health,
Indianapolis, IN

"When I first moved to Washington, DC to work at Safe Kids (in 2004), my apartment was not ready and I was faced with finding a hotel for two months. **Cheryl, without hesitation and always generous,** invited me to stay with her. I was immediately part of her carpool, had breakfast and dinner with her everyday, and went to every craft fair known to man in that time period. One of our favorite things to do was to watch

the new cooking star Rachel Ray making her 30-minute meals. To this day I can't look at Rachel Ray without thinking of Cheryl. It's a pleasant memory and I will sorely miss my good friend."

— Lorrie Walker, Safe Kids Worldwide

What I remember most about Cheryl was her enthusiasm for child passenger safety. She was always smiling and eager to spread the word about child passenger safety. **She likely saved thousands of children's lives as a result of her devotion and dedication to educating parents and the public about the importance of using child restraint systems.**

— Elaine Weinstein, NHTSA Occupant Protection Program (1978-80); Executive Director, National Child Passenger Safety Association (1981-87); NTSB Safety Studies Division and Safety Recommendations Office (1990-2010, retired).

"I have fond memories of working with Cheryl within the child passenger safety and occupant restraint programs. What I found to be most impressive about Cheryl was that **she was always willing to speak up for doing what was right** and what was needed to promote CPS issues regardless of whether or not it was what the "powers that be" wanted to hear. We should all thank Cheryl for what she did to promote CPS programs, education, and training back before we had the standardized curriculum and certification program. We all owe Cheryl a lot."

—Bill Hall, Highway Safety Research Center, University of North Carolina

"Sitting in the Lifesavers Conference in Orlando, FL, last week, memories of great conferences and great friends crossed my mind.

"It was at Lifesavers in Indianapolis, IN, more than 17 years ago, where Cheryl, Joel Bolton, and I went to the bar in the lobby of the hotel—not to get a drink, but to work on what is now called Operation Kids. We had talked for a long time about involving law enforcement and public safety officials in the cause, but it was time to get serious. During the conference and after we returned home from Lifesavers, we worked many late nights making Operation Kids come to life. It was an undertaking we relished.

"Later **Cheryl led the team to create** what we now use as the standard teachings for CPS. Yes, the curriculum has changed over the years, but the core product is still from those early days in a bar at Lifesavers.

"The creative team put together by Cheryl was a great and driven team of individuals who, like her, lived occupant protection. These people, who have become like family, have all contributed greatly over the years to the fields of CPS and traffic safety."
—Bob Wall: Immediate past chair, National Child Passenger Safety Board; Traffic Safety Specialist (RET), Fairfax County Police, VA, and International Association of Chiefs of Police (RET)

"Cheryl was one of the most enthusiastic and dedicated persons I have ever worked with in the field of CPS. **Nothing seemed impossible to her.** Most CPS Technicians have no idea the numbers of hours of work and lost sleep Cheryl contributed to the long and difficult birth of the NHTSA Standardized Child Passenger Safety Training



Cheryl (left) at Lifesavers 2009 with Deborah Stewart (center) and Carol Meidinger (right) of North Dakota.

Program in the late 1990s.

"One of the funniest times was when Cheryl and several others of us were trying so hard to put the Standardized Curriculum together in the right format. We would type the major "Need-to-Know" points on the left side of the page and then try to figure out just how to get them lined up with the "Nice-to-Know" information on the right side. We were soooo inexpert at using the PC Word Format that we were nearly paralyzed by the fear that we would make a mistake and have to start all over again. And then (purely by accident) we learned about the wonders of the "UNDO"

edit button! We ran around the room singing "We can always DO an UNDO . . . We can always DO an UNDO"

"What a relief, put this massive project together, knowing we could just UNDO the previous mistake(s)!"

—Nancy Lang, CPST-I, Louisville, Kentucky

"My memories of Cheryl go way back to the days of the National Child Passenger Safety Association (1981-89). I was the new kid on the block and Cheryl took me under her wing, treating me with respect and kindness. From her, I learned that the safety of children was not just a job – but a true passion. While Cheryl took her job seriously, she also knew how to have fun and had such a zest for life. **She truly was a mentor to me and to so many others.**"

— Carol (Holzer) Meidinger, Department of Health, ND

"I will always remember when she was a keynote speaker at Moving Kids Safely Conference about 15 years ago, and she stopped talking and unbuttoned her shirt. Under her blouse was a T-shirt that read 'I Am More Than My Job.' She was so associated with occupant protection, clearly a field leader but with a **great sense of humor** about it."

— Kerry Chausmer, Certification Director, Safe Kids Worldwide

"Cheryl's laugh and smile were so contagious that **you could not keep from smiling and chuckling right along with her!**"

—Susan Laurence, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

Cheryl was always trying new things.

In an effort to do an early update of CPS folks around the country, she planned a session to be televised to training centers around the country. This must have been in the mid-1990s. I joined her (and several others) in a studio on Texas to do the update. Folks in many states attended remotely.

Cheryl arranged to show us, for the first time, the newest ISOFIX prototype with rigid attachments. It was so slick and simple to install – we felt like magicians simply clicking the connectors into bars on an auto seat and pushing it into the cushion. Voila! It was so easy—but was it too good to be true?

—Deborah Stewart, Safe Ride News